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RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0780  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4325  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 7871  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5432  
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 1290  
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1221  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RANGOON 001207

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DEPT FOR EAP/MLS, DRL, AND IO  
PACOM FOR FPA

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SUBJECT: BURMA'S PRO-DEMOCRACY MOVEMENT STILL ALIVE

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Classified By: P/E Chief Leslie Hayden for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

11. (C) Summary: Burma's famous comedian and political activist, Zarganar, is organizing monks, students, factory workers, and others to participate in follow-up demonstrations to the September marches. He recently received a letter from Aung San Suu Kyi thanking him for his role in organizing the September protests, acknowledging the need to review the leadership of the NLD, and instructing him to work closely with certain members of the NLD whom she trusted. According to Zarganar, a group of approximately 100 Karen activists in the Irrawaddy Delta region are gathering explosives and weapons and planning a violent attack on the regime. End summary.

12. (C) Pol/econ chief met with famous actor/comedian and political activist Zarganar, who is working day and night to reconstitute Burma's pro-democracy movement and organize support for follow-up demonstrations to the monk-led marches last September. Due to the recent arrests of the entire leadership of the 88 Generation Students and the most active and effective members of the NLD Youth, Zarganar has taken on the responsibility for reorganizing the movement's remaining members.

13. (C) Zarganar maintains contact with 150-200 activists who remain at large and are willing to demonstrate again. Asked about rumors of protests and general strikes being organized for Burma's Independence Day January 4, Zarganar replied that this date was too early for the coordinated effort he is preparing. Zarganar also communicates with several monks who helped organize the September protests and then fled to the Thai/Burma border. These monks include the activists U Kovida, who sought asylum in the U.S., and U Keititharya, who is in Mae Sot and working to set up a commune for Burmese monks and political activists who have recently fled there. Zarganar said these monks are networking with Burmese monks all over the world to record and distribute DVDs of lectures from venerated elder monks. These lectures encourage more protests and peaceful disobedience against the Than Shwe regime.

¶4. (C) Zarganar said that monks in Pakkoku and Mandalay were regrouping and preparing to demonstrate again. He reported the stories of posters urging monks to protest and refuse donations from the regime were true. Since the authorities have been ripping them down, he said, the monks now post them in the restrooms at various monasteries; a method of communication the regime has not discovered yet. If the monks do march again, according to Zarganar, they will begin their demonstrations in cities outside of Rangoon. The monasteries in Rangoon have been almost totally purged, Zarganar said. The few monks who remain are too scared to participate in any demonstrations.

¶5. (C) Zarganar has also tapped his extensive contacts in Burma's entertainment industry to urge them to boycott making movies until the regime initiates a real dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi and the pro-democracy opposition. Zarganar said a 3-4 month strike would cripple the highly-profitable Burmese movie industry and put the 3,000 - 4,000 movie theaters operating in Burma out of business. He has urged several of his famous friends to join such a strike. When asked why they will not work, he has recommended they reply, "because there is no dialogue." Some have been receptive, others are afraid but mulling it over, Zarganar claimed.

¶6. (C) Zarganar is also working with students at Rangoon's Dagon University adding that, although there is interest, the numbers of those willing to demonstrate again is small. Fear still prevents the discontented from going public. Nonetheless, Zarganar has managed to enlist the help of 30 young recruits to distribute VCDs containing anti-regime messages in popular markets and in local factories. Zarganar has also tried to enlist the participation of disgruntled Rangoon factory workers in future demonstrations. He again acknowledged that many factory workers were supportive and interested, but felt the current environment was too risky to

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come forward.

¶7. (C) Zarganar admitted that he has had to keep a low profile since he was released from Insein prison last October. He has urged other activists to do the same, while continuing to work and organize quietly and discreetly. Kyaw Thu, the famous actor who helped Zarganar organize the September protests, collects all the movement's funds, Zarganar explained. Kyaw Thu's Free Funeral Society's offices provides the perfect cover for those who want to donate to the pro-democracy movement, he added. About one million kyat (\$800) a month has been donated to the movement through Kyaw Thu, which Zarganar then distributes to political prisoners, monks, families of political prisoners, and activists.

¶8. (C) Zarganar expressed concern about the imprisoned 88 Generation leaders. In order to monitor their health and receive messages from Min Ko Naing, Ko Ko Gyi, and others, Zarganar has organized 9 activists to be arrested for "sleeping on the street" during the night, which carries a two week sentence. These prisoners must work inside Insein prison to empty chamber pots from each cell, Zarganar explained, which will enable them to communicate with the jailed activists and monks and gather information about their living conditions and health. Two volunteers have already been arrested and will be released on January 8, and another seven are preparing to be arrested shortly. Zarganar recently heard that 88 Generation Leader Jimmy suffers from Pneumonia, so arranged to provide him medicine because the prison did not have it.

¶9. (C) Zarganar discounted a rumor that he had recently met with Aung San Suu Kyi. He acknowledged, however, that he had received a letter from her thanking him for his role in organizing the recent demonstrations and instructing him to work with five members of the NLD to organize future movements: U Moe Thu, U Aung Lwin, U Chan Aye, Daw San San

Nwe and Daw Myint Myint Khin. Zarganar told us he organized a meeting between himself and these five last week, who agreed to work closely with him.

¶10. (C) Zarganar relayed that Aung San Suu Kyi expressed frustration with the NLD "Uncles," and acknowledged the need to review the leadership of the NLD. Zarganar asserted that he has "had it" with the Uncles, who refuse to do anything to support the younger activists in the pro-democracy movement. He reported the Uncles were jealous that Aung San Suu Kyi chose U Myint Thein and U Nyan Win to be her liaisons, and therefore sought to expel the two from the party. The Uncles want to keep control of the NLD, Zarganar believed. Zarganar said he argues with the Uncles on an almost daily basis, urging them to take a more public and active role to promote democracy in Burma, which they refuse to do.

¶11. (C) Zarganar told us about a group of around 100 young Karen activists, based in the Irrawaddy Delta town of Pantanaw, who he claimed were procuring weapons and explosives and planning a violent attack against the regime in Nay Pyi Taw. Zarganar had met with the group recently. The activists reported receiving insurgency training two years ago in Mae Sot and had established a safe house in Pyimana, fifteen miles from the capital of Nay Pyi Taw, where they had stashed their weapons. The group had planned to attack the annual Burmese academy awards ceremony, which the senior generals usually attend, but abandoned the plan when the ceremony was recently postponed from its planned date in January.

¶12. (C) Comment: Burma's political activists may be down, but Zarganar shows they are not out. Min Ko Naing claimed if he or other known leaders were arrested, then others were prepared to step forward. Zarganar has done so and is recruiting others. Burma's pro-democracy movement desperately needs Zarganar's energy, ideas, organizational skills, contacts, and activism. He is the antithesis of the NLD's inactive leaders so it is no wonder he is beginning to clash with the Uncles. Although Zarganar advocates solving

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Burma's political problems through non-violence, he fears people may resort to other methods if Burma's worsening economic and social problems are not addressed soon. End comment.  
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